

# Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 2

March 2008

## From County Executive Chris Collins



Thank you for taking the time to read the second issue of the Erie County Taxpayer Newsletter.

My administration is continuing to publish information that will encourage taxpayers to get involved in the process of reforming Erie County government.

I have made some additions to Erie County's website and urge you to take the time to look around. Included in this month's addition is information on the online application process for volunteer boards and advisory committees, as well as the Brighter Future Fund.

I hope you continue to take advantage of the taxpayer feedback link to send an e-mail to my office with your thoughts and concerns. As always, I am working hard to ensure that governmental operations continue to become more open and transparent.

## Six Sigma Update

Continuing to increase efficiency and decrease waste throughout Erie County government, Six Sigma Director Al Hammonds is conducting overview sessions for Legislators, Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, managers and other key employees throughout Erie County government. By the end of March, over 200 employees will have been introduced to Lean Six Sigma in county government.

Major topics discussed during each four hour session include:

- What is Lean Six Sigma and what will it mean to Erie County?
- What are the short-term and longer-term strategies for communication and implementation of Six Sigma within county departments?
- What are the different roles and responsibilities for employees in institutionalizing Six Sigma?

Six Sigma is funded through efficiency grants from the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority, not Erie County taxpayers. When the ECFSA was established, New York State set aside \$18 million to help Erie County return to fiscal stability. This money is specifically designated for Erie County and is awarded after a thorough review by the Control Board. This administration hopes to use approximately \$1 million towards the implementation of Six Sigma.

## Hepatitis A Clinics

Last month, Erie County vaccinated over 10,000 people at the Hepatitis A clinics held at Erie Community College's North Campus. The clinics were established after a Wegmans produce department employee was diagnosed with the Hepatitis A virus, potentially exposing the store's shoppers. In just hours, county employees and department heads came together to pull off one of the largest vaccination clinics in New York State history.

Commissioners Anthony Billittier (Health), Gerard Sentz (Public Works) and Greg Skibitsky (Emergency Services) showed great leadership in their quick and effective response to the potential exposure of Hep A.

The employees of Erie County continue to demonstrate their commitment to public health and safety with their quick responses in emergency situations. The residents of Erie County are very fortunate to have such a strong, competent, and dedicated workforce. A vast majority of the residents of Erie County have expressed their approval in how the clinics were organized.

*Hepatitis A Clinics continued on pg. 2*

## Contact the County Executive

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## Space Utilization Initiative

The Collins Administration has brought into county government a space utilization initiative, which is designed to increase efficiencies within the County.

Approved by both the Legislature and the Erie County Fiscal Stability Authority, Michelle Mazzone was hired as the Director of Space Utilization. Before joining the Collins' Administration, she was a former VP of the Ciminelli Development Corporation, and owned her own business.

*Space Utilization continued on pg. 2*

## Volunteer Boards

County Executive Collins wants more taxpayers to participate in Erie County government. To achieve this, he has established an online application process for the various volunteer boards currently functioning, as well as the advisory committees he is looking to establish for various county functions.

The County Executive holds the power to appoint nearly 400 volunteer board positions with various duties and missions to oversee the work of county government. Board terms are varied and staggered, with boards covering a wide range of areas. By serving on a board, residents are dealing with matters important to our community and making decisions that will impact all of Erie County.

The volunteer advisory committees have been established to solicit ideas from Erie County professionals with valuable skill sets and expertise. By focusing on bringing private sector skills to government, Collins can begin to deliver vital services in a more effective and efficient manner. Areas in which advisory committees will be used are: economic development; emergency medical services; energy efficiency; information technology; insurance; parks; purchasing; six sigma; veterans affairs; and tourism promotion.

Residents can apply for both the advisory committees and the volunteer boards through Erie County's website, [www.erie.gov](http://www.erie.gov), or by mail. Instructions for application can be found on our homepage.

## Office of Veterans Services

In an effort to put more of a focus on veterans' services, the County Executive and Legislature have restructured the Office of Veterans Services by making it a stand along agency. Leading the Office of Veterans Services is Patrick Welch, a Vietnam veteran and retired Marine. Patrick is accredited with the Vietnam Veterans of America, and is in the process of gaining accreditation from other service organizations, including the American Legion and the VFW.

The main duty of the office is to assist veterans in filing federal benefit claims. Welch also helps direct veterans to other benefits that may be available to them such as property tax exemptions and educational assistance.

Currently, Welch is working to update the County's Veterans Services website to contain links to all veterans' organizations. He also plans to start an electronic newsletter for all Erie County service members.

The Office of Veterans Services can be found online at [www.erie.gov/veterans](http://www.erie.gov/veterans). Welch also suggests visiting the federal government's Department of Veterans Affairs online at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) for additional information.



### Brighter Future Fund

County Executive Collins and Deputy County Executive Davis have established the Brighter Future Fund to provide grant money to deserving Erie County non-profit organizations. Both are working for \$1 per month until the hard Control Board reverts back to advisory status. Until that point, the remainder of their salaries will be donated to the Brighter Future Fund.

The Fund has been established at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo.

falo, and a selection committee has been created to review applications and determine which organizations will receive funding. Grants will be awarded to groups who meet the established criteria at a minimum of \$2,500 and a maximum of \$10,000.

Brighter Future Fund grant awards will be determined based on an organization's commitment to:

- Increasing economic self-sufficiency for low-income individuals and families

- Reducing racial and social disparities among Erie County residents
- Serving the youth and elderly populations of Erie County

Grant awards will be announced on a 30-60 day basis based on the quality and quantity of grant proposals received. No Erie County funding or resources will be used to administer this fund. More information as well as application instructions can be found at:

[www.brighterfuturefund.org](http://www.brighterfuturefund.org)

### Hepatitis A Clinics continued...

The clinics served as a valuable learning experience as we determined both the strengths and weaknesses of the emergency response system, and how to improve our response in the future.

This real life situation also highlighted some key state regulations that need to be changed in order to respond effectively to major emergency situations. The Collins Administration will be working with our state delegation to push for these changes in Albany.



### Space Utilization continued ...

Mazzone will be conducting a full review of county assets to determine how to best use space in the Rath Building as well as other county facilities. She is looking at current employee workspace to ensure they are provided with the appropriate means to efficiently do their jobs.

Mazzone will also be in charge of negotiating the business aspect of county leases, as well as managing space already leased by the county. Previously, no one person has been in charge of county leases.

### Coming next month...

- *County Cell Phone update*
- *Changes at the Erie County Industrial Development Agency (ECIDA)*
- *Mayors and Supervisors Meeting*